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FM AMEMBASSY TASHKENT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0532
INFO CIS COLLECTIVE
NATO EU COLLECTIVE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0127
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 0174
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0136
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0133
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0136
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0167
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 0129
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TASHKENT 000223

SIPDIS SIPDIS
DEPT FOR SCA/CEN, SCA/PPD, AND DRL
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019-02-26

TAGS: PHUM KPAO PGOV PREL SOCI UZ

SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: IV ALUMNUS AND DISABLED RIGHTS ACTIVIST ARRESTED

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CLASSIFIED BY: Richard Fitzmaurice, Poloff; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

1. (C) Summary: On January 21 an independent news website reported that Chairman of the Uzbek Society of the Disabled (and International Visitor Leadership Program [IVLP] alumnus) Oybek Isoqov had been arrested on charges of bribery. When CAO met with him on February 13, Isoqov denied all wrongdoing and explained that he was coerced by authorities into admitting the legal charges against him. He remains free pending a verdict and believes that the charges stem from his vocal activism on behalf of disabled persons. End Summary.

2. (C) Oybek Isoqov participated in the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) "Advocates for the Disabled" in June 2007. He is also a former Democracy Commission grantee. Not long after his return from the IV program, he enthusiastically told CAO about the progress that he and other advocates were making on convincing the GOU to join the UN Convention on the Rights of the Disabled.

3. (U) On January 21, the independent Uznews.net website reported that Isoqov had been arrested on charges of taking a bribe. According to the article, he was subsequently charged with embezzlement, abuse of office, negligence, forgery and bribery. The article further states that the man that gave Isoqov the bribe, Farid Abdurashidov, was also later arrested and charged with intermediation in bribery and receiving a bribe through blackmailing.

4. (U) Comment: While the article speculated that Abdurashidov's arrest was connected to his serving as a defense attorney for several members of the Human Rights Alliance who were charged with holding an illegal demonstration, we believe this is highly unlikely. The activists were eventually fined by the court, a routine occurrence that would have happened regardless of who defended them in court. End comment.

ISOQOV'S MISTAKES

5. (C) In his meeting with CAO Isoqov, who is disabled himself, said that the story reported by Uznews is false. He explained that he lent Abdurashidov money earlier last year, for which Abdurashidov signed an IOU. On September 25, Abdurashidov visited Isoqov to repay the loan. Moments after Abdurashidov returned the money and left, militia entered Isoqov's office and arrested him.

6. (C) Isoqov believes that he was targeted for his general criticism of the GOU in regards to disabled rights. He explained that he had served in an advisory capacity for the Oliy Majlis (the lower house of Parliament), where he was not shy in calling attention to instances in which the members knowingly violated the Uzbek constitution. Furthermore, he mentioned an August 2008 meeting of NGOs that work on disabled issues in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. Representatives of NGOs from CIS countries and Iran gathered to make an appeal to the heads of the EuraSec countries, who were meeting in Dushanbe at the same time, to join the Convention on the Rights of the Disabled. Isoqov believes that the

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GOU was not pleased by the negative attention this generated.

7. (C) Isoqov does not believe that these legal problems are a direct result of his involvement with the U.S. Embassy. He thinks it more likely that they began both as a result of his outspokenness and the personal ambitions of an individual named Khasan Burkhanov, who is the former Chairman of the Tashkent City

Branch of the Society of the Disabled. According to Isoqov, Burkhanov, hoping to become the Chairman of the national Society, approached the NSS to frame Isoqov and take his job. As Isoqov was already making the GOU uncomfortable, this information was enough for the NSS to act. Isoqov speculates that NSS officers gave marked bills to Burkhanov, who in turn convinced Abdurashidov to repay his debt to Isoqov with them.

... AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

18. (C) After his arrest, Isoqov was held overnight at the prosecutor's office where he was not allowed to use the restroom for twelve hours and subjected to "psychological pressure." The authorities threatened that if he did not sign a confession, they would keep him in jail for the entire duration of his legal proceedings, or five to six months. Eventually, Isoqov felt he had no choice but to sign, and after posting bail, he was released.

19. (C) Isoqov has since lodged a complaint with the General Prosecutor describing the pressure the militia placed on him and also how his rights were violated when the authorities interrogated him past 11 pm. He was subsequently removed from his post as Chairman of the Society of the Disabled. He explained that he also thinks the NSS is putting pressure on the Ministry of Justice to force the Society to elect a new Chairman quickly while Isoqov is still embroiled in legal problems.

110. (C) Isoqov is a lawyer himself and prior to becoming Chairman in 2003, had defended some activists in court. Knowing the system as he does, he is not optimistic about the outcome of the proceedings, but he expressed his gratitude to Embassy staff for meeting him and providing moral support as he awaited the next hearing later in February.

111. (C) Comment: Isoqov has long been a reliable grantee, alumnus, contact, and outspoken advocate for the disabled in Uzbekistan, and we believe the general details he provided about his arrest are plausible. We think it is unlikely that Isoqov was targeted for his advocacy on behalf of disabled persons, especially his lobbying for Uzbekistan to adopt the UN Convention on the Rights of the Disabled (in fact, all other indications point to Uzbekistan adopting the Convention in 2009). As he himself speculated, most likely Isoqov was framed by Burkhanov, who might have been interested in taking over the Uzbek Society of the Disabled for his own personal gain. There is also no indication that Isoqov was targeted for his association with the Embassy. We will continue to follow Isoqov's case closely and will provide any updates. Isoqov himself specifically asked the Embassy not to

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intervene on his behalf. End comment.
NORLAND

To view the entire SMART message, go to URL http://repository.state.sgov.gov/_layouts/OSS/SearchResults.aspx?k=messageid:5e1b35a7-ec0c-432a-8c